

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Avner, Zoe, Markula, Pirkko and Denison, Jim (2017) Understanding Effective Coaching: A Foucauldian Reading of Current Coach Education Frameworks. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 4 (1). pp. 101-109. ISSN 2328-918X

Published by: Human Kinetics

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0108> <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0108>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/35976/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

Understanding Effective Coaching: A Foucauldian Reading of Current Coach Education

Frameworks

Abstract

Drawing on a modified version of Foucault's (1972) analysis of discursive formations, we selected key coach education texts in Canada to examine what discourses currently shape effective coaching in Canada in order to detect what choices Canadian coaches have to know about "being an effective coach." We then compared the most salient aspects of our reading to the International Sport Coaching Framework. Our Foucauldian reading of the two Canadian coach education websites showed that the present set of choices for coaches to practice "effectively" is narrow and that correspondingly the potential for change and innovation is limited in scope. Our comparison to the International Sport Coaching Framework, however, showed more promise as we found that its focus on the development of coach competences allowed for different coaching knowledges and coaching aims than a narrow focus on performance and results. We then conclude this Insights Paper by offering some comments on the implications of our Foucauldian reading as well as some suggestions to address our concerns about the dominance of certain knowledges and the various effects of this dominance for athletes, coaches, coach development and the coaching profession at large.

Keywords: coach development, Foucault, discourses

Coaching scholars have identified coach education as key to raising the standard of coaching practice (Burton & Raedecke, 2008; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Jones et al., 2004; Knowles et al., 2006; Lyle, 2002; Martens, 1987; Nelson et al., 2013). Similarly, many coaching agencies now highlight the importance of improved education (e.g., the Coaching Association of Canada). As a result, formal coach education programs and certifications, for example, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in Canada, have been developed to ensure that coaches are “meeting or exceeding the high standards embraced by more than 60 national sport organizations in Canada” (CAC, 2016) and providing athletes with access to effective coaching.

However, while coaching scholars agree on the importance of developing effective coaches, as Côté and Gilbert (2009) underlined, there is little consensus on what effective coaching means and the experiences coaches must acquire in order to become effective. Côté and Gilbert sought to remedy this by proposing an integrative definition of coaching effectiveness as, “the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection and character in specific contexts” (p. 316).

In this paper, we are interested in examining what constitutes effective coaching as reflected in prominent coach education websites and programs in Canada. More specifically, we are interested in understanding what set of ‘knowledges’ currently shape how effective coaching is represented within these websites and programs.

We chose to frame our discussion of the knowledges of effective coaching through a Foucauldian perspective, which focuses on how power operates through discourses defined as “ways of knowing, which are perpetuated through our everyday practices” (Markula & Silk,

2011, p. 48). According to Foucault (1978), discourses are to be understood as the ensemble of rules and conditions, which allow for certain knowledges to be produced and be intelligible. Furthermore, discourses and power relations are intricately interrelated and co-constitutive: “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (1979, p. 27).

From a Foucauldian perspective, any knowledge that a coach draws upon (e.g., physiological, sociological, managerial, etc.), can be understood as a discourse as each one of them corresponds to a specific way of understanding and practicing sport coaching and training. Such discourses can either become dominant and understood as the “Truth” of sport coaching or be marginalized within a specific discursive field (e.g., performance sport). For example, currently a number of scientific discourses primarily inform how we understand and practice “effective coaching.” This does not mean that these discourses will always dominate, as Foucault was careful to point out that discourses should not be understood as static entities: We must not imagine a world of discourses divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements, which can come into play in various strategies (1978, p. 100).

Therefore, following Liao and Markula (2009), we were interested in looking at two prominent Canadian coach education websites to understand “what knowledges [currently] dominate [the field of sport coaching], where they come from, and how they have become dominant” (p. 40). Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective was instrumental in enabling us to move beyond the surface rhetoric of these websites and start to think critically about how

dominant discourses and power relations operate through these coaching resources. More specifically, our Foucauldian perspective enabled us to start to think critically about what dominant understandings of effective coaching and “best coaching practices” are produced through these coach education frameworks and what some of the effects of this might be. Gaining such an understanding is paramount, we believe, if we want coaches to do more than uncritically apply so-called “best coaching practices.” Our purpose, therefore, in writing this paper is twofold: firstly, to examine the current possibilities for coaches to understand and practice “effective coaching” and secondly, to show coach educators and coaches how drawing on a Foucauldian framework might open a space for understanding and practicing “effective coaching” differently.

In what follows, we introduce the two Canadian websites we selected and our Foucauldian perspective and share the insights we gleaned from our Foucauldian reading. We then elaborate on some of the implications of our insights about the current possibilities for understanding and practicing “effective coaching.” Following this, we compare our insights from this reading to the International Sport Coaching Framework given its high status and influence as an “internationally recognised reference point for the education, development and recognition of coaches” (ISCF, 2012). Finally, we conclude by offering some suggestions to address our concerns about the dominance of certain knowledges and the various effects of this dominance for athletes, coaches, coach developers and the coaching profession at large.

A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) website, which was the first coaching website we examined, has for a mission statement to enhance “the experiences of all Canadian athletes through quality coaching.” It is directly connected to the National Coaching

Certification Program (NCCP) with goals to “empower coaches with knowledge and skills, promote ethics, foster positive attitudes, build competence, and increase the credibility and recognition of coaches” (CAC, 2016). The CAC website acts as a promotional tool for the NCCP as well as for the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model and encourages coaches to “Find out where they fit” (CAC, 2016) and register for various coaching courses (community, competitive, or instruction).

The second website we examined was the Sport for Life Society (S4L) website. The S4L website is far more information rich than the CAC website and targets a wider audience, that includes parents, athletes with disabilities, educators, health practitioners, and recreation professionals. It officially promotes the LTAD model and outlines its various stages: “the LTAD is a seven-stage training, competition and recovery pathway guiding an individual’s experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). This seven stage model outlines coaching guidelines for various stages of development (Active Start, Fundamentals, Learning to Train, Training to Train, Training to Compete, Training to Win, and Active for Life) and for different streams and contexts (recreational, competitive). The first three stages (Active Start, Fundamentals and Learning to Train) provide the shared foundation for both the recreational/active for life pathway and for the competitive/high-performance and elite sporting pathways.

Our reading of these websites was inspired by Foucault’s (1972) analysis of discursive formations that he conducted as part of his “archaeological” and “genealogical” work. This work for Foucault involved identifying concepts and theories as discursive elements in texts and then detecting what discourses are most present and active in these sources. More specifically, concepts, according to Foucault (1972), were the various discursive elements that

could be linked together in order to produce intelligible theories about a specific object. In our case here, that would mean concepts that refer to various elements that together produce intelligible theories about effective coaching in performance sporting contexts. Concepts are, then, first articulated together into various statements and then into theories, which refer to how individualized groups of statements “link with general domains of statements” (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 131). Theories are then further connected to discourses and to power relations in order to understand what discourses dominate and what discourses are marginalized in a particular discursive field (e.g., performance sport).

To begin our Foucauldian reading, the first author printed off and scanned through all the pages of the S4L and the CAC websites in order to identify reoccurring words for each website. This engendered a long list of words for each website, which we then grouped together in charts and organized into “larger concepts.” We identified the following nine larger concepts from this exercise: athletes, coaches, competition/performance, development, fun, health, instruction/learning, skills, and training.

We then linked these nine concepts together into 19 statements. These statements represented for us the possible relationships that could be shown to exist between these concepts. To elaborate, these 19 statements represented what we saw to be the possible ways in which our nine larger concepts could relate to each other in order to produce “true” and “intelligible” statements about sport, physical activity and coaching. For example, our analysis of the concept “athlete” showed that it intertwined with the other eight concepts to produce the following “truths” about athletes:

- Successful athletes achieve their potential through physical and mental skill development to win in competitions;

- Athletes are well-rounded and lifelong participants in sport and physical activity;
- Athletes remain healthy and injury free by avoiding burnout and premature specialization;
- Athletes need to insure they recover properly from training and competitions.

Next, we took the 19 statements we formulated and grouped them into three distinct “domains of statements” or theories about sport, physical activity and coaching. That is, we asked ourselves, how has the knowledge represented in these websites been put together and organized to shape what we know about “effective coaching?” By doing this, we were able to identify the following three theories as the strongest and most obvious representation of what effective coaching “means” on these websites: “effective coaching for performance/competitive sport,” “positive coaching for lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity,” and “true sport for lifelong engagement in physical activity.” Importantly, from a Foucauldian standpoint, any theories that one formulates from a group of statements always also represents the limits of discourse and what can and cannot be said or written about a specific object or practice at a particular socio-historical time. The development of these theories, therefore, was a particularly important aspect of our reading as it was what enabled us to begin to understand the perspectives that currently dominate what it means to be an effective coach. Accordingly, in what follows we elaborate further on each of the theories we created as a result of our reading.

Effective Coaching for Performance Sport

Our Foucauldian reading of the CAC and S4L websites enabled us to observe the emphasis placed on physical training as well as on a planned approach to training as central to effective coaching. Effective coaching was articulated as the optimal development of athletes’

physical and mental skills while the recommended approach to physical training was always a periodized approach where training, competition, and recovery were based on scientific principles. The S4L website defined periodization as a planned approach to sport training which involved “creating comprehensive training, competition and recovery plans to deliver peak athlete performance at the right time” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). To support the importance of periodized training, the S4L website dedicated an entire section to inform coaches about the ‘10 Key Factors’ of effective training (Sport for Life Society, 2016). Seven of these key factors were physiological (physical literacy, specialization, developmental age, sensitive periods, periodization, competition, excellence takes time), one psychological (mental, cognitive, and emotional development), one organizational (system alignment and integration), and one philosophical (continuous improvement). From these key factors and training principles, it became clear to us how dominant various scientific discourses are in shaping coaches’ current understandings of effective coaching.

Both websites also indicated that to perform well as an athlete is to achieve results by winning in national and international competitions. For example, the CAC website stated, “This stage is about training to win at the highest levels of sport: international competition” (CAC, 2016). Although successful performance was defined as winning competitions, it was also admitted that competition is stressful and induces physical (and mental) fatigue. Therefore, training, in addition to optimizing competition success, must be carefully planned and individualized to ensure athletes recover: “Training is carefully planned, with the training year divided into one, two, three, or more cycles, depending on the demands of the sport and the individual athlete’s strengths” (CAC, 2016).

We were also struck by the emphasis on athlete health in our reading of the websites. Indeed, first and foremost, a healthy athlete remained injury free and avoided mental and physical burnout: “Coaches must allow frequent preventative breaks to prevent physical and mental burnout” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). In addition, a healthy athlete leads a balanced lifestyle which includes an optimal diet and physical fitness level to support his/her commitment to high-volume and high-intensity training throughout the year. As the CAC website stated, “Proper nutrition is important for overall good health and optimal athletic performance” (CAC, 2016).

However, we did not anticipate the strong connection between mastering physical skills and avoiding injuries. Indeed, according to the websites, physical skill was considered the most important factor for avoiding injuries and thus, achieving one’s potential to win in competitions. Specifically, two types of skills were emphasized: fundamental movement skills, which include the “ABC’s of Agility, Balance, Coordination, and Speed” (Sport for Life Society, 2016) and sport specific, technical skills. At the same time, both websites, we noticed, discussed how coaches should avoid premature specialization (e.g., the focus on sport specific, technical skill) to ensure that their athletes remain injury free. As the “learn to train” section in the S4L website stated: “Premature specialization promotes one-sided development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout” (Sport for Life Society, 2016).

While the emphasis on physical skill training to foster and promote athlete health did not completely surprise us, we were surprised to see how little mental skill training was emphasized given its rise in popularity and acceptance across both academic and coaching circles. Furthermore, when mental skill training was discussed we were struck by how narrow this discussion was. For example, the websites mainly focused on aspects of mental skills

204 training that supported athlete motivation and performance excellence: improved focus,
205 visualization, and goal setting. The reason behind this emphasis became clearer to us as we
206 carried on with our reading and began to see how, according to the websites, “positive” and
207 “desirable” mental skills such as athlete motivation and confidence are natural bi-products of
208 sport on the condition that coaches and athletes adhere to the scientific training and athlete
209 development principles outlined by the LTAD (Sport for Life Society, 2016). Meaning,
210 mental skills training, as represented on these websites, is only important and useful if it can
211 be used by a coach in addition to scientific knowledge to support athletes’ performances and
212 results. In other words, what connecting the dominant concepts and statements about effective
213 coaching together into a theory really helped us to see, was that despite a strong rhetoric
214 around the need for coaches to focus on outcomes other than just striving for results, this
215 particular focus is still stronger than anything else in the education and development of
216 effective coaches in Canada.

217 Furthermore, connecting the dominant concepts and statements together into a theory
218 about effective coaching helped us to see the dominance of scientific discourses which
219 encompass such knowledges as sport physiology or sport medicine in shaping current
220 understandings of what it means to be an “effective coach.” Moreover, we were able to see
221 how this narrow and limited the understanding of effective coaching is a result of this
222 dominance. Again, we found this surprising given the shift in coaching research towards more
223 complex understandings of effective coaching as, for example, “the consistent application of
224 integrated professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’
225 competence, confidence, connection and character in specific contexts” (Côté and Gilbert,
226 2009, p. 316). This is why we found that reading these coach education websites and

programs through a Foucauldian lens was so useful because it allowed us to move beyond any surface rhetoric to understand how dominant discourses operate through these websites and how they both enable and constrain how we can understand and practice “effective” coaching.

Positive Coaching for Lifelong Engagement in Sport and Physical Activity

The second theory that we formed based on our 19 statements about sport, physical activity and coaching was the theory of positive coaching for lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity. Positive coaching was articulated as the development of fundamental physical movement and sport skills. This “physical literacy” was further defined: “Physically literate individuals demonstrate a wide variety of basic human movements, fundamental movement skills, and fundamental sport skills” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). In addition, the development of “mental fitness” defined as “instilling foundational principles of positive attitude, positive focus, and imagination, while emphasizing effort and fun,” was also an important aspect of being a positive coach (Sport for Life Society, 2016).

In other words, a positive coach aimed to promote lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity, optimal health, and holistic individual development, which considered “mental, cognitive and emotional development combined with physical development, ensuring each athlete develops as a complete person” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). Furthermore, the recommended approach to becoming a positive coach emphasized prioritizing fun and safety as a coach (<http://www.coach.ca/coaching-the-basics-s16571>, 2015). Such coaching also needed to be athlete-centred and based on the scientific principles of human growth and maturation. Human growth was defined as “observable step-by-step changes in quantity and measurable changes in body size such as height, weight, and fat percentage,” whereas maturation referred to “qualitative system changes both structural and

functional, in the body's progress towards maturity such as the change of cartilage to bone in the skeleton" (Sport for Life Society, 2016).

Lastly, according to the websites, positive coaches are trained and certified by the NCCP; act as good role models, mentors, and leaders; are good planners, managers, problem-solvers, and critical thinkers (CAC, 2016).

However, despite all of this emphasis in the websites on the importance of coaching in an athlete-centred and holistic way, we were surprised by how uninformative the websites were in this regard. Indeed, there was very little information regarding how coaches might actually implement an athlete-centred or holistic coaching approach. This strongly contrasted with how well developed the various key physiological factors and principles for effective coaching for performance sport were, with further links systematically provided for each key physiological factor. The S4L website is the best example of this inconsistency, by strongly encouraging coaches to follow links to "find out more" about effective training principles such as periodization (Sport for Life Society, 2016), whereas no further links were provided to find out about athlete-centred coaching or holistic athlete development.

This reading of the websites echoes Headley-Cooper's (2010) research results on coaches' perspectives on athlete-centred coaching, which highlighted coaches' lack of conceptual clarity around this term, but also:

How coaches attach divergent meanings to the term 'athlete-centred' sport, referring to a holistic philosophy of the athlete, coaching practices that involve athletes within the coach-athlete partnership, specific values as essential components of athlete-centred coaching, and a philosophy of success that extends beyond athletic performance. (p. ii)

Her study also helped to illustrate certain barriers that coaches identified towards implementing an athlete-centred coaching approach such as “concerns about winning and receiving funding, lack of athlete-centred coaching approaches in youth sport, coaches level of experience and confidence, structure of the national team program, etc.” (p. v). These observations also echo the work of Cassidy (2010) who argued that calls for holistic coaching “are based on little more than good intentions and a dictionary definition” (p. 439). She claimed that the term “holistic coaching” remains highly ambiguous within coach development circles and as a result has the potential to become meaningless and disregarded.

Indeed, what connecting dominant concepts and statements into a theory about positive coaching helped us to see was that despite a strong rhetoric about the importance of coaches focusing on developing healthy and well-rounded individuals, these broader aims were not supported by any resources or pragmatic information. This indicated to us that positive coaching and its broader aims of optimal health and holistic individual development are secondary to obtaining results and not what really matters for a coach to be effective. Again, we found this surprising given the rise in popularity and acceptance across the broader field of coach development of positive sport psychology coaching models and research (e.g., Bigelow, et al., 2001; Kidman, 2007; Mastrich, 2002; Thompson, 1995, 2003).

True Sport for Lifelong Engagement in Sport and Physical Activity

The third theory we formed based on our 19 statements about sport, physical activity and coaching was the theory of true sport for lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity. True sport is “an undertaking by all Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments and leading sport organizations to collaborate on preventing unethical behaviours and promoting ethical conduct in Canadian sport. True Sport members across Canada are committed to

community sport that is healthy, fair, inclusive, and fun” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). True sport is also fun, promotes lifelong physical engagement in physical activity, and leads to optimal health and individual development. Furthermore, true sport “puts children and youth in a positive life course, builds stronger and more inclusive communities, and contributes to economic and environmental sustainability” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). As such, true sport strongly overlaps with the second theory we discussed of positive coaching for lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity.

The concept of “fun” is perhaps the best example of the overlap between the two theories. Indeed, fun was linked to children, the development of fundamental movement and sport skills through varied and challenging exercises and free play, positive coaching and youth development, a lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity, and true sport. These connections were supported by the positive sport psychology literature for youth sport (e.g., Holt, 2008; Ommundsen & Vaglum, 1991; Sabock & Sabock, 2008; Smoll & Smith, 1987; Thompson, 1997, 2003; Wells et al., 2008). These researchers were concerned with bringing the fun back into youth sport to ensure the lifelong engagement and participation of all in sport and physical activity. Again, similar to the statements about athlete-centred coaching, what we found most striking about the statements about fun was the paucity of pragmatic information or any referral to resources regarding how coaches are supposed to design and implement programs intended to promote fun in sport beyond just advocating such true sport principles as “go for it, play fair, respect others, keep it fun, stay healthy and give back” (Sport for Life Society, 2016). This dearth of information regarding fun once again contrasted heavily with the abundance of coaching information and resources regarding how coaches are supposed to train their athletes for optimal performance and achieving results.

Therefore, what connecting the dominant concepts and statements into a theory about true sport really brought to light for us was once again the disconnect between the strong rhetoric around fun and optimal health and individual development and the presence of any pragmatic resources to help coaches design practices with these goals in mind. This indicated to us once again that these “other” aspects of being an effective coach such as ensuring that one’s athletes are having fun, developing the whole individual and striving for optimal health are more lip service and not backed up by anything specific and practical that a coach could do to achieve these outcomes.

Finally, as we emphasized in our introduction and made clear as our purpose for carrying out this reading, a key part of using Foucault to read such texts like these two coaching websites is to then be able to connect the theories that emerged to discourses and power relations. Therefore, in what follows, we connect the three theories from our reading of these two websites that we have just discussed to the discourses and power relations of sport coaching. We focused our discussion on dominant and marginalized discourses in sport coaching in order to better understand what the set of choices for coaches to know about and practice effective coaching are.

A Connection to Discourses and Power Relations

Our reading of the websites through Foucault allowed us to gain a complex understanding of how certain ‘truths’ about coaching, sport, and physical activity are produced, disseminated, and come to be dominant. It also allowed us to gain an understanding of what discourses are marginalized through current dominant ways of understanding and practicing coaching and sport and physical activity.

Connecting the various theories we identified to discourses showed us that there is actually a great deal of overlap between the discourses which inform the theory about effective coaching and the discourses which inform both the theories of positive coaching and true sport for lifelong engagement in sport and physical activity. Indeed, all three theories are dominantly informed by specific scientific knowledges of the body (e.g., sport medicine, sport physiology) as well as sport psychology. This showed us that the range of possibilities for coaches to understand and practice “effective” coaching is currently very narrow despite numerous coaching scholars advocating for more complex socio-historical-political understandings of coaching effectiveness (e.g., Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones et al., 2004) which better account for the social dimensions of the coaching process.

Furthermore, despite the increased push towards an athlete-centred, holistic coaching approach which promotes both “personal and performance excellence” (e.g., Kidman, 2007; Miller & Kerr, 2002), effective coaching and positive coaching remain articulated as two separate fields in the websites we examined. Based on our observations, to be “effective” a coach doesn’t actually need to adhere to the principles of positive coaching (i.e., to adopt a fun, athlete-centred, and holistic coaching approach). Rather, our observations indicated that a coach only needs to adhere to the principles of positive coaching insofar as they support the primary aim of performance sport: to win and/or to achieve improved results.

This tension between the qualities of being a “positive coach” versus the expectations surrounding being an “effective coach” is most evident in the various diverging and sometimes contradictory statements and definitions about athlete health. Indeed, athlete health in the effective coaching theory is simply articulated as being injury free and avoiding mental burnout. These reductionist statements about athlete-health align with dominant

understandings of athlete health in the coaching literature on performance sport (e.g., Cohn, 1990; Raedeke & Smith, 2004). This body of research unquestioningly positions the physical and mental stresses induced by competition as natural, intrinsic, and unavoidable. The onus for maintaining health is placed on the individual athlete to develop coping skills and strategies and on the coach to carefully plan his or her training in order to insure that his or her athletes can recover from the natural physical and mental stresses of competition. Furthermore, mental skill development is largely viewed as a natural bi-product of athletes and coaches adhering to the scientific principles of training and athlete development (e.g., physical literacy, human growth and maturation).

This very narrow and instrumental definition of athlete health contrasts with the more complex and holistic understanding of athlete-health put forward by positive coaching scholars (e.g., Bigelow, et al., 2001; Holt, 2008; Kidman, 2007; Mastrich, 2002; Thompson, 1995, 2003), which considered “managing the psychological effects from the athlete’s performance to non-sport domains; developing the core individual beyond their athletic persona; and recognizing the dynamic relationship between an athlete’s thoughts, feelings, physiology, and behavior” (Friesen & Orlick, 2010, p. 227).

The power relations at work in the production of such narrow understandings of athlete-health in the theory of effective coaching are very apparent upon closer examination of the S4L website and LTAD model. Indeed, there are no coaching resources dedicated to helping coaches understand how to develop athletes holistically whereas there are countless resources dedicated to informing coaches about the principles of training and competition recovery and regeneration for athletes (Sport for Life Society, 2016). This clearly indicated to us that the more complex understanding of athlete health put forward in the positive coaching model as

the holistic development of the individual is currently marginalized by the dominant understanding of athlete health put forward in the effective coaching for performance model as simply avoiding injuries through the implementation of periodized training plans to optimize athletes' recovery and regeneration. Therefore, it is this second narrow understanding of athlete health supported by the sport sciences and designed to improve performance and results that dominantly shapes coaches' understandings of athlete health and of their roles in insuring that their athletes "stay healthy."

However, our reading of the CAC and S4L coaching websites through Foucault enabled us to move beyond showing either the dominance or the marginalization of certain discourses to examine how these discourses come into play with each other and what power relations are produced and sustained as a result. For example, the contrast between the strong rhetoric around holistic and athlete-centred coaching and the absence of pragmatic resources for coaches to design practices with these goals in mind in the websites we examined plays a strategic role in enabling coaches to continue coaching how they always have always coached while being led to believe they are coaching differently so long as they adopt this rhetoric. Indeed, drawing on positive coaching principles, coaches might strive to coach in a more "holistic" or "athlete-centred" way. However, what our Foucauldian reading showed is that positive coaching principles such as "athlete-centred" or "holistic coaching" are not actually related to any new alternative coaching practices. In fact, they are related to the same scientific training and athlete development practices put forward in the dominant performance-oriented scientific coaching discourse (e.g., periodization). And, if as shown in our Foucauldian reading of key coaching websites, to be a positive coach means in practice to adhere to the same scientific training and athlete development practices as the ones put

forward in the dominant scientific performance oriented coaching discourse, then what choices do coaches have to critically interrogate these same practices or to coach differently?

This question, it seems to us, is central to thinking about effective coaching, coach learning and coach development. Clearly we do not want programs, curricula and frameworks that simply reproduce one way of thinking, being and doing as a coach. Again, as Côté and Gilbert (2009) argued, to be effective a coach needs to be able to integrate and draw upon different knowledges such as “professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection and character in specific contexts” (p. 316).

But clearly such breadth and scope in thinking as a coach can be difficult and challenging given the power that many long standing traditions, histories and entrenched ways of coaching have to limit and constrain coaches such as sport’s strong scientific logic (Denison, Mills, & Konoval, 2015). Therefore, given our interest and commitment to coaching as a practice that requires one to be able to think deeply, critically and differently about various norms and taken-for-granted practices, we thought it would be interesting to examine the International Sport Coaching Framework and compare its content and representation of effective coaching to our reading of the S4L and CAC websites and what we saw to be the dominance of various scientific discourses with an emphasis on physical skill training, periodized planning, and athlete performance and results.

A Comparison to the International Sport Coaching Framework

The International Sport Coaching Framework (ISCF) was prepared in collaboration with the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) and the Association for Summer

Olympics International Federations (ASOIF) following a process of consultation in order to “support and recognise the role of coaches at all levels across the globe” (ISCF, 2012, p. iii).

This document is organised into eight chapters, which cover the following topics: coaching framework foundations, coaching in context, coaching recipients and impact, coaching roles, coaching competence, coach education and development, coach certification and recognition, and lastly coaching framework benefits. Chapters two through five were particularly pertinent to us as we sought to understand how “effective coaching” was represented and discussed within this framework in comparison to the two coach education websites we previously examined.

Comparing the ISCF to the S4L and CAC websites helped us to see that there is definitely some overlap between the three coaching frameworks. For example, all three coaching “texts” support the Long Term Athlete Development model (LTAD), albeit to varying degrees. As a result of this overlap, we found that the same scientific discourses (physiology, sport medicine and psychology) that were highlighted on the S4L and CAC websites were also prominent in shaping what it means to be an “effective coach” in the ISCF framework. More specifically, we found a similar emphasis on scientific concepts such as “periodized planning”: “Devising a strategy includes the short term, mid-term, and long-term planning of sessions, seasons, and programs” (ISCF, 2012, p. 24) as important aspects of “effective coaching.”

However, the ISCF also differed from the other two frameworks, as one of its foci was the development of coaching competences: “Coaching capability involves competency – demonstrated capability in a given context – and underpinning knowledge” (ISCF, 2012, p. 23). These core functions or competences of coaching included setting the vision and strategy,

shaping the environment, building relationships, conducting practices and structuring competitions, reading and reacting to the field, and learning and reflecting.

This focus on the development of coaching competences, we believe, allows for a greater recognition of context and, as a result, for other coaching aims than a narrow focus on performance and results: “coaching effectiveness is gauged by the consistency with which positive outcomes for athletes and teams are achieved, reflected only in part by competitive success” (ISCF, 2012, p. 10). In addition, the focus on coaching competences allowed for different knowledges to emerge as evidenced in the ISCF’s in-depth discussion of the different professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledges needed to coach “effectively” (Côté & Gilbert, 2009).

Importantly, what a shift towards a competency driven model for understanding effective coaching in different contexts also helps to do, is to disrupt the hierarchy between the two separate coaching streams of performance and participation sport and the “tendency to traditionally associate the lower levels with the coaching of children and young participants and the higher tiers with coaching in the performance context” (ISCF, 2012, p. 21). This recognition of context also lies at the heart of the Standards put forward by the ICCE in its effort to enhance the exchange and cooperation between sport coaching scholars and practitioners through the development of the first International Sport Coaching Bachelor Degree:

In bringing the Standards to life, specific national and local contexts and domains of practice need to be appreciated and respected. There will be different best-fit models based on specific situations and requirements, and all of them may deliver the required learning outcomes and coaching competencies in different ways. (Lara-Bercial et al., 2016, p. 345)

That said, as much as we see the shift towards a focus on the development of coaching competences and the recognition of different coaching contexts as positive steps towards broadening understandings of “effective coaching,” we did find the compartmentalization of coaching roles and responsibilities outlined on the ISCF concerning as this can easily lead to a number of hierarchical understandings of responsibility and knowledge among coaches, which, in turn, can accentuate power imbalances in various coaching contexts.

To summarize, while our comparative reading of the ISCF framework showed that the ISCF doesn’t necessarily give coaches the tools to challenge the dominance of certain coaching discourses and the impact of this dominance on the athletes they coach, the focus on the development of coaching competences does, we believe, carve out a space for broader understandings of “effective coaching,” which we think can better equip coaches to manage the complexity and uncertainty that runs across every unique coaching context.

Conclusion

Conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis of selected key coaching websites (S4L and CAC) enabled us to understand what discourses or sciences currently shape coaches’ understanding of effective coaching in Canada and, therefore, detect the set of choices for coaches to know about and practice effective coaching. Our Foucauldian reading of these websites showed that the present set of choices to practice “effective” coaching is narrow and, that correspondingly the potential for change and innovation in coaching is quite limited. Our comparative reading of the ISCF framework, however, showed more promise in that the ISCF allows we believe for broader more contextual understandings of “effective coaching.”

What is, however, also clear from our Foucauldian reading of the two Canadian websites is that change in sport coaching and the development of practices based on some of the key

tenets of positive sport psychology such as athlete-centred and holistic coaching will not happen by simply injecting a different coaching rhetoric into various coaching models. As our Foucauldian reading showed, this strategy, due to the complex workings of power, has done little to promote significant change. Put differently, simply injecting a different coaching rhetoric into a coaching framework like athlete-centred or holistic coaching is unlikely to challenge the dominant discursive formation of coaching unless it is accompanied by a problematization of the power relations that produce coaching's dominant discourses. As a result, such a strategy, while possibly done with the intention of broadening what effective can coaching mean, will not fundamentally challenge or change dominant power relations within sporting and coaching contexts.

Moving forward, it is imperative to detail the impact of these dominant knowledges on the actual practice of coaching. It is only possible to create more athlete-centred and holistic coaching practices if the knowledge set of effective coaching is opened up for further problematization. By problematization, we mean that no coaching knowledge or so called "best coaching practices" should be uncritically accepted and applied by coaches. Rather, coaches, as well as coach educators who create frameworks and develop curricula, need to continuously ask themselves how they have come to know what they know and take for granted to be "true" about being an effective coach. That is, what knowledges dominate their understanding of effective coaching, what ways of knowing are marginalized or obscured by this dominance and what are the effects of these dominant knowledges and practices on their athletes.

This process of re-politicizing coaching "truths" and the production of coaching knowledge at large will enable coaching scholars and coaches to interrogate some of the

problematic disciplinary and normalizing/objectifying effects of their practices. This will undoubtedly mean more work as coaches will no longer be able to subscribe to a set of guidelines or practices in order to become an “effective” or “positive” coach. But as Denison and Avner (2011) argued, such a process can also be tremendously liberating for coaches “as it frees them from the burden of always having to figure out ‘the right way’ to solve problems and coach” (p. 224), and allows them to devise truly innovative coaching practices that can benefit their athletes, themselves, and the coaching profession at large. In this regard, the work of problematizing coaching “truths” and “best practices” is not about being negative or pessimistic. Rather, it is about understanding that all coaching knowledges and practices have their uses, but also their dangers and problematic effects and that a commitment to mitigating these dangers should be a priority for all of us involved in coach education and development.

References

- Bigelow, B., Moroney, T., & Hall, L. (2001). *Just let the kids play: How to stop adults from ruining your child's fun and success in youth sports*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications.
- Burton, D., & Raedeke, T. D. (2008). *Sport psychology for coaches*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Sport for Life Society (2016). Sport for Life (S4L). Retrieved from www.canadiansportforlife.ca/
- Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). (2016). Coach.ca. Retrieved from <http://www.coach.ca/>
- Cassidy, T. (2010). Holism in sports coaching: Beyond humanistic sport psychology. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 5(4), 439-443.

- Cohn, P. J. (1990). An exploratory study on sources of stress and athlete burnout in youth golf. *The Sport Psychologist*, 4(2), 95-106.
- Côté J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sport Sciences & Coaching*, 4(3), 307-325.
- Cushion, C. J., & Jones, R. L. (2006). Power, discourse, & symbolic violence in professional youth soccer: The case of Albion Football Club. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23, 142-161.
- Denison, J., & Avner, Z. (2011). Positive practices for athlete development. *Quest*, 63(2), 209-227.
- Denison, J., Mills, J. P., & Konoval, T. (2015). Sports' disciplinary legacy and the challenge of "coaching differently." *Sport, Education, & Society*. DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2015.1061986.
- Dreyfus, H. L., & Rabinow, P. (1983). *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, vol. 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline & punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Friesen, A., & Orlick, T. (2010). A qualitative analysis of holistic sport psychology consultants' professional philosophies. *The Sport Psychologist*, 24, 227-244.
- Jones, R., Armour, K., & Potrac, P. (2004). *Sports coaching cultures: From practice to theory*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Headley-Cooper, K. J. (2010). *Coaches' perspectives on athlete-centred coaching* (Master's Thesis. University of Toronto, Canada). Retrieved from

https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/24252/1/Headley-Cooper_Karlene_J_201003_MSc_thesis.pdf

Holt, N. (2008). *Positive youth development through sport*. London, UK: Routledge.

International Council for Coaching Excellence and Association of Summer Olympics

International Federations. (2012). International Sport Coaching Framework. Retrieved from <http://www.icce.ws/>

Kidman, L. (2007). Humanistic coaching – teaching games for understanding. In R. Light (Ed.), *Proceedings for the Asia Pacific Conference on Teaching Sport and Physical Education for Understanding* (pp. 59-71). Sydney, Australia: University of Sydney. Retrieved from http://www.profllearn.edsw.usyd.edu.au/resources/papers/Proceedings_TGfU_06_AsiaPacificSport.pdf#page=59.

Knowles, Z., Tyler, G., Gilbourne, D., & Eubank, M. (2006). Reflecting on reflection: Exploring the practices of sports coaching graduates. *Reflective practice*, 17, 163-179.

Lara-Bercial, S., Abraham, A., Colmaire, P., Dieffenbach, K., Mokglate, O., Rynne, S., Jimenez, A., Bales, J., Curado, J., Ito, M., Nordmann, L. (2016). The International Sport Coaching Bachelor Degree Standards of the International Council for Coaching Excellence. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 3, 344-348.

Liao, J., & Markula, P. (2009). Reading media texts in Women's sport: Critical discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis. In P. Markula (Ed), *Olympic Women and the media* (pp. 30-49). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: A framework for coaches' behavior*. London, UK: Routledge.

- 591 Markula, P., & Silk, M. (2011). *Qualitative research for physical culture*. Basingstoke,
592 UK: Palgrave.
- 593 Martens, R. (1987). *Coaches' guide to sport psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- 594 Mastrich, J. (2002). *Really winning: Using sports to develop character and integrity in our*
595 *boys*. New York: St. Martins.
- 596 Miller, P. S. & Kerr, G. A. (2002). Conceptualizing excellence: Past, present, and future.
597 *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14, 140-153.
- 598 Nelson, L., Cushion, C. J., & Potrac, P. (2013). Enhancing the provision of coach education:
599 The recommendations of UK coaching practitioners. *Physical Education and Sport*
600 *Pedagogy*, 18(2), 204-218.
- 601 Ommundsen, Y., & Vaglum, P. (1991). Soccer competition anxiety and enjoyment in young
602 boy players: The influence of perceived competence and significant others' emotional
603 involvement. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 22(1), 35-49.
- 604 Raedeke, T.D., & Smith, A.L. (2004). Coping resources and athlete burnout: An examination
605 of stress mediated and moderation hypotheses. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*,
606 26(4), 525-541.
- 607 Sabock, R.J., & Sabock, M.P. (2008). *Coaching: A realistic perspective*. New York: Rowan
608 & Littlefield.
- 609 Smoll, F. L., & Smith, R. E. (1987). *Sport psychology for youth coaches*. Washington:
610 National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry.
- 611 Thompson, J. (1995). *Positive coaching: Building character and self-esteem through sports*.
612 Portolla Valley, CA: Warde.

Thompson, J. (2003). *The double-goal coach: Positive coaching tools for honouring the game and developing winners in sports and life*. New York: Quill.

Wells, M. S., Arthur-Banning, S. G., Paisley, K., Ellis, G. D., Roark, M. F., & Fisher, K. (2008). Good (youth) sports: Using benefits-based programming to increase sportsmanship. *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration*, 26(1), 1-21.